COMPUTER PROGRAM PRODUCT FOR PERFORMING TESTING OF A SIMULATED STORAGE DEVICE WITHIN A TESTING SIMULATION ENVIRONMENT

CROSS-REFERENCE TO CO-RELATED APPLICATION

[0001] The present invention is related to the subject matter of the following commonly assigned, co-pending United States Patent Application: Serial No. 10/___,___ (Docket No. HSJ920030143US1) entitled "Method for Performing Testing of a Simulated Storage Device Within a Testing Simulation Environment" and filed ________, 2003, which is incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Technical Field

[0002] The present invention relates in general to an improved computer program product for testing and verification, and, in particular, to an improved computer program product for testing and verification in a simulated-hardware environment. Still more particularly, the present invention relates to an improved computer program product for performing testing of a simulated direct access storage device within a simulation environment.

2. Description of the Related Art

[0003] The modern trend toward constant and rapid improvement in technology has forced technology companies to adapt to a market environment where the saleable life of a technology is limited and frequently prematurely terminated by the frenetic pace of innovation. In order to maximize the useful life of a product when facing a shrinking window of time between commercialization of an invention and displacement by superior innovations, technology companies have undertaken every possible effort to reduce product cycle time. Manufacturers frequently turn to virtual prototyping and simulation testing techniques to enable them to test products before the design reaches the factory floor. Virtual prototyping and simulation testing techniques carry the added benefit of reducing the cost of development. But as will be discussed below, current virtual prototyping and simulation testing techniques also add risk and costs to the design process.

[0004] Simulation testing techniques inject unique complications into the design and testing of complex technological products. A recurring and somewhat daunting problem relates to the need to test the interaction of separate systems, both of which are in development at the same time, to external stimuli. Where separate systems such as underlying hardware and control software form integral parts of the product delivered to the customer, integration testing must be used to verify that the parts will, in fact, perform together as specified. Particularly in modern data processing and storage systems, where the hardware and software form equally critical parts of the product, it is necessary to rigorously test their interactions.

[0005] Testing the interaction of the hardware-under-development with the software-under-development sounds inherently simple; one need only produce a prototype of the hardware and then monitor the performance of the control software on the completed hardware platform. The unfortunate reality is that time-sensitive cycles of parallel development often require integration testing of the software and the underlying hardware prior to production of the hardware itself. Testing must frequently occur before a working prototype of the hardware exists.

[0006] In the direct access storage device industry, as in many others, the answer has been to produce a virtual prototype of the relevant hardware. The virtual prototype is a data processing system program, operating in a testing simulation environment, which models the expected behavior of the hardware. In order to perform integration testing, a specially engineered version of the software under development is conventionally loaded into the simulation environment and sends commands to the virtual hardware. Such methods have allowed for testing of the expected interactions of non-existent hardware with the software designed to control the virtual hardware, but the use of a specially engineered version of the software carries its own problems.

[0007] Current testing methods call for the insertion of special program instructions into the software, which will presumably be removed from the software at a later time. As an example, a testing and verification group might need to determine the combined response of the software and the hardware to the presence of a thermal abnormality in the underlying hardware. To do this, lines of code in the software will be inserted, which will, in effect, write a thermal error code to the underlying hardware. The hardware will then react to this error code, taking some measures based on its own firmware, and passing the error back to the software for further scrutiny.

[0008] The first, and most obvious problem with this approach, is that integration of the special error-code instructions into the software-under-development changes the performance dynamics of the software. Machine cycle times are skewed by the need to perform the lines of code that pass error codes to the hardware. This reduces the accuracy of the simulation by causing the development and testing version of the software to exhibit behavior that will not be present in the production version of the software. Because the timing of microprocessor operations can prove critical to successful operation of the completed system, this mere problem of timing due to presence of testing instructions can severely cripple the usefulness of the integration testing. Injecting work-arounds to correct for delays in software operation can introduce an added factor of unreliability. Simply put, the fidelity of the test to the software that will actually form a component of the finished product is substantially undermined.

[0009] Another problem relates to the burdensome nature of manual insertion of the testing commands into the software-under-development. The manpower involved in properly coding the test instructions into the software-under-development adds cost to the development process and creates version management issues. Frequently, a separate testing and verification group, composed of persons less familiar with the software-under-development than the people who have written the software, performs the integration testing. The cost of providing the testing and verification team with the requisite familiarity with the underlying software, and then having them perform, and later remove, changes to the software, adds materially to the cost and number of skilled programmers necessary to deliver the product. The fact that the changes to the software necessary to facilitate testing must be made manually also discourages thoroughness in testing by imposing an unacceptably high time-cost for each test performed.

[0010] Finally, the presence of human error in the process of testing creates real problems. One such problem is the problem of version management. Once simulation testing has begun, the programmers, who are developing the software, must take care not to make revisions to the software without insuring that the revisions are passed to the testing and verification group. Frequently, in order for the testing and verification group to make the modifications that need to be made in order to test the software, they must isolate the code from further tinkering by the software design team. The frequently unhappy result is that revisions to the software are lost because the revisions are not inserted into the most current version-under-test, or that they are inserted and are never tested because the testing and verification group had no notice of the insertion of the code. Occasionally, testing and verification instructions are inadvertently left in the software product after testing is completed, causing the finished product to display anomalous behavior that was not anticipated by the designers.

[0011] All of the above-mentioned problems undermine the effectiveness of current testing techniques, and a remedy that would both lower the cost and increase the effectiveness of simulation testing is desired. What is needed is a separation of the testing function from the development of software through a computer program product for simulation testing that automates the error code process and removes the need to insert testing instructions into the software-under-development.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0012] A computer program product for performing testing of a simulated direct access storage device in a testing simulation environment is disclosed. The computer program product provides a software representation of a group of hardware components within a simulated direct access storage device. The computer program product also uses a control program module within the testing simulation environment, wherein the control program module interacts with the software representation of the hardware components, and a testing program for interacting with the control program module and the software representation of the plurality of hardware components. In response to detection of an occurrence of a pre-selected event within the simulated direct access storage device, one or more codes are sent from the testing program to the software representation of the hardware components and the correctness of a response by the control program module to the one or more codes is determined.

[0013] All objects, features, and advantages of the present invention will become apparent in the following detailed written description.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0014] The novel features believed characteristic of the invention are set forth in the appended claims. However, the invention, as well as a preferred mode of use, will best be understood by reference to the following detailed description of an illustrative embodiment when read in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein:

[0015] Figure 1 is a block diagram of a data processing system equipped with a behavior-simulation environment program, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

[0016] Figure 2 is a block diagram of a testing script file data structure, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

[0017] Figure 3 is a flowchart of a process for performing test events in a behavior-simulation environment, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention; and

[0018] Figure 4 is a block diagram illustrating message flow between the components of a data processing system for the process of performing test events in a behavior-simulation environment, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0019] With reference now to the figures, and in particular with reference to **Figure 1**, a data processing system equipped with a behavior-simulation environment program, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, is illustrated. For purpose of simplicity in explanation, many components of a data processing system have been omitted from **FIG. 1**, and only those parts necessary to facilitate an understanding of the invention have been included. All components of a data processing system that have been omitted from **FIG. 1** are well known to those skilled in the data processing arts at the time of the invention, though other substitute components may later be developed and substituted without departing from the scope of the present invention.

[0020] A data processing system **100**, contains a processing storage unit or a RAM **102** and a processor **104**. Data processing system **100** also includes a unit of storage **106** such as a hard disk drive or other direct access storage device. An Input/Output (I/O) control unit **108** provides connectivity to a network **110** through a connectivity device such as a network cable **112**. I/O control **108** connects to one or more units of user I/O **114** such as one or more of a keyboard, monitor, and printer through the use of connecting means **116**, such as cables or wireless linkages.

[0021] Processor **104** executes programs in the course of performing the present invention. An operating system **117** includes instructions to manage the interactions of processor **104**, RAM **102**, I/O control **108**, and storage **106**. In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, processor **104** executes a simulation environment program **118**. Simulation environment program **118** calls for the execution of instructions contained in a hardware model **120**, containing a simulated memory **126**, a testing program **124**, and a control program module **128**.

[0022] Within RAM **102**, data processing system **100** stores several items of data and instructions, while operating in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention. These include a testing event script file data structure **122** and a process log **123**. One skilled in the data processing arts will quickly realize that additional components of data processing system **100** may be added to or substituted for those shown without departing from the scope of the present invention.

[0023] Simulation environment program **118** includes a computer program product, stored in RAM **102** and executed on processor **104**, which provides a series of tools for behavior-based simulation testing. Generally speaking, simulation environment program **118** contains rule-based instructions for predicting the behavior of logically or mathematically modeled items of hardware and software. Simulation environment program **118** uses the series of rules contained in its own instructions, in conjunction with one or more of hardware model **120**, testing program **124**, and control program module **128** to predict the response of hardware model **120** and control program module **128** to external and internal stimuli contained in testing event script file data structure **122**, which contains error codes and debug instructions.

[0024] Depending on what items of hardware are under test, hardware model **120** may model the designs of many different kinds of hardware, but preferably provides a software representation of direct access storage device control components such as microprocessors and application specific integrated circuits (ASIC)s, in a direct access storage device. In some tests, such as those where a new control program module **128** is under development for application to completely developed hardware, hardware model **120** may contain a model of previously deployed hardware. In other tests, such as those where an entirely new hardware platform is being developed with no existing hardware, hardware model **120** may model the designs of an entire system of hardware that has not yet been produced.

[0025] Simulation environment program **118** records results of the interaction of hardware model **120** and control program module **128** to external and internal stimuli contained in testing event script file data structure **122** to process log **123**, a result recording file. Simulation environment program **118** may also report the contents of process log **123** or the status selected indicators of the status of hardware model **120** and control program module **128** to user I/O **114**

through the use of connecting means **116**, such as cables or wireless linkages. Additionally, all or part of simulation environment program **118**, testing program **124**, operating system **117**, testing event script file data structure **122**, hardware model **120**, control program module **128**, and process log **123** may, at times, be stored in storage **106** or in RAM **102**.

[0026] Turning now to **Figure 2**, a testing event script file data structure, containing test events, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, is depicted. For purpose of simplicity in explanation, some components of a testing event script file data structure **200** have been omitted from **FIG. 2**, and only those parts necessary to facilitate an understanding of the invention have been included. All components of a testing event script file data structure **200** that have been omitted from **FIG. 2** are well known to those skilled in the data processing arts at the time of the invention, though other substitute components may later be developed and substituted without departing from the scope of the present invention. Testing event script file data structure **200**, labeled in the previous **FIG. 1** as testing event script file data structure **122**, will typically contain one or more testing event data substructures. Testing event script file data structure **122** and testing event script file data structure **200** are interchangeable labels reflecting the same component. Testing event script file data structure **200** may contain as few as one testing event data substructure or a hypothetically limitless plurality of testing event data substructures.

[0027] In a preferred embodiment presented in **FIG. 2**, three such testing event data substructures have been included. These testing event data substructures are a first testing event data substructure **202**, a second testing event data substructure **204**, and an nth testing event data substructure **206**. In the preferred embodiment depicted in **FIG. 2**, each testing event data substructure contains six fields. First testing event data substructure **202** contains a component data field **208**, a checkpoint event data field **210**, a checkpoint event qualifier data field **212**, a checkpoint event timeout data field **214**, an error injection/action event data field **216**, and a last entry data field **218**. To aid in explanation of the invention, all of the data fields in first testing event data substructure **202** and most of the date fields in nth testing event data substructure **206**

have been left blank. The data fields in second testing event data substructure **204** have been filled with hypothetical values to facilitate discussion through an example of testing data, as has a part of nth testing event data structure **206**.

[0028] Component data field **208** indicates the simulated hardware subsystem on which the action described in first testing event data substructure **202** will operate. On a machine language level, simulation environment **118** translates the value of component data field **208** with the aid of hardware model **120** to ascertain the memory registers in simulated memory **126** designated for action by component data field **208**. The memory registers in simulated memory **126**, called for in component data field **208**, are then set to values called for by first testing event data substructure **202**. In second testing event data substructure **204**, component data field **220** indicates that the simulated hardware subsystem on which the action described in second testing event data substructure **204** operates is the disk interface subsystem.

[0029] Checkpoint event data field **210** describes the event, for which testing program **124** will wait, before performing action described in first testing event data substructure **202**. In second testing event data substructure **204**, checkpoint event data field **222** indicates that the event, for which testing program **124** will wait before performing action described in second testing event data substructure **204**, is a sector read.

[0030] Checkpoint event qualifier data field **212** describes additional details of the event described in checkpoint event data field **210**. In second testing event data substructure **204**, checkpoint event qualifier data field **224** indicates that the event, for which testing program **124** will wait before performing action described in second testing event data substructure **204**, is a sector read returning a value that matches the variable LBA#.

[0031] Checkpoint event timeout data field **214** describes the length of time that testing program **124** will wait for the occurrence of the event described in checkpoint event data field **210**. In second testing event data substructure **204**, checkpoint event timeout data field **226** indicates that testing program **124** will wait a length of time equal to the variable x, before a timeout causes the event described in second testing event data substructure **204** to fail.

[0032] Error injection/action event data field **216** describes the event that testing program **124** will perform after the occurrence of the event described in checkpoint event data field **210.** In second testing event data substructure **204,** error injection/action event data field **228** indicates that testing program **124** will pass a thermal asperity error code to the simulated disk interface.

[0033] Last entry data field **218**, represents a flag set to inform testing program **124** that it has reached the end of testing event script file data structure **200.** In second testing event data substructure **204,** last entry data field **218** indicates that second testing event data substructure **204** is not the end of testing event script file data structure **200**. However, in nth testing event data substructure **206**, where component data field **232**, checkpoint event data field **234**, checkpoint event qualifier data field **236**, checkpoint event timeout data field **238**, and error injection/action event data field **240**, have been left blank for the sake of simplicity in explanation, last entry data field **242** is set to the value of one. Last entry data field **242** is set to the value of one to indicate to testing program **124** that it has reached the end of testing event script file data structure **200.**

[0034] Reading the test event described in second testing event data substructure **204**, then, while simulating the operation of the simulated hardware, testing program **124** waits for the length of time X for a sector read event, wherein the value returned matches the variable LBA#. Once that condition has been met, the disk interface simulated component would be instructed to generate an event simulating the detection of a thermal asperity.

[0035] One skilled in the data processing arts will quickly realize that additional components of testing script file data structure **200** may be added to or substituted for those shown without departing from the scope of the present invention.

[0036] With reference now to **Figure 3**, a high-level flowchart of a process for performing test events in a behavior simulation environment, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, is illustrated.

[0037] The process begins at step **300**, which depicts activating a simulation environment program **118**, in accordance with the preferred embodiment of the present invention. Activating a simulation environment program **118** involves sending initial component instructions from simulation environment program **118** from storage **106** to RAM **102** and executing initial instructions on processor **104**.

[0038] The process then proceeds to step **302**, which illustrates the preferred embodiment of the present invention loading a hardware model **120**. Hardware model **120** includes direct access storage device control components such as microprocessors and application specific integrated circuits, called ASICs. In some tests, such as those where a new control program module **128** is under development for application to completely developed hardware, hardware model **120** may contain parameters to model a set of components that already exists in a corporeal embodiment. In other tests, such as those where an entirely new hardware platform is being developed with no existing hardware, hardware model **120** may model the designs of an entire system that has not been produced.

[0039] The process then moves to step **304**, which depicts the preferred embodiment of the present invention loading control program module **128**. Next, the process enters step **306**, which shows the preferred embodiment loading a testing program **124**. The process next proceeds to step **310**, which depicts the preferred embodiment of the present invention loading a testing event script file data structure **200**.

[0040] The process then moves to step **312**, which depicts the testing program **124** requesting testing event data substructure **202** from the testing event script file data structure **122** stored in

RAM **102**. The process then proceeds to step **314**, which depicts the testing program **124** receiving testing event data substructure **202**.

[0041] The process next moves to step **322**, which depicts testing program **124** determining whether the pre-condition to the testing event is present. To do this, testing program **124** determines whether the condition described in checkpoint event **210** has occurred as described in checkpoint event qualifier **212**. If the testing program determines that the condition described in checkpoint event **210** has not occurred as described in checkpoint event qualifier **212**, the process then proceeds to step **315**, which illustrates the process waiting a pre-defined length of time, and the process then returns to step **322**. In second testing event data substructure **204**, while the simulation environment **118** is simulating the operation of hardware model **120**, the disk interface simulated component of the ASIC would wait a length of time X for a sector read event to return the value stored in the variable LBA#. Once a sector read event returns the value stored in the variable LBA#, the process moves to step **316** as described below.

[0042] If the testing program determines that the condition described in checkpoint event **210** has occurred as described in checkpoint event qualifier **212**, then the process moves to step **316**, which depicts sending a code set to simulated memory **126**. In second testing event data substructure **204**, while the simulation environment **118** simulates the operation of hardware model **120**, the testing program writes a code set simulating the detection of a thermal asperity to simulated memory **126**. This event is preferably injected into the simulation to detect the response of the system to a thermal error.

[0043] The process then proceeds to step **318**, which depicts the control program module **128** responding to the thermal asperity code. The process next moves to step **320**, which illustrates the testing program querying and recording the response of control program module **128** and hardware model **120** to the event in step **316**. Such recording is preferably performed through the use of command lines in testing event script file data structure **122**, which includes commands to monitor and record variables in the simulation.

[0044] The process then moves to step **323**, which illustrates the testing program **124** checking last entry data field **218**, which represents a flag set to inform testing program **124** that it has reached the end of testing event script file data structure **122**, also labeled as testing event script file data structure **200**. In second testing event data substructure **204**, last entry data field **218** indicates that second testing event data substructure **204** is not the end of testing event script file data structure **200**. However, in nth testing event data substructure **206**, last entry data field **242** is set to the value of one. That last entry data field **242** is set to the value of one to indicate to simulation environment program **118** that it has reached the end of testing event script file data structure **200.**

[0045] If testing program **124** discovers that it has reached the last entry in testing event script file data structure **122**, then the process next proceeds to step **324**, which depicts testing program **124** publishing a record of its results. This step includes storing process log **123** in storage **106** and may include delivery of a performance report to user I/O **114**. Once step **324** is completed, the process moves to step **326**, which illustrates testing program **124** ending the process of the preferred embodiment of the present invention.

[0046] If, in step **323**, testing program **124** does not conclude that it has reached the last entry in testing event script data structure **122**, then the process next proceeds to step **312**, which depicts testing program **124** requesting the next event data substructure **202** from the testing event script file data structure **122** stored in RAM **102**.

[0047] Turning now to **Figure 4,** a block diagram of message flow between the components of a data processing system for the process of performing test events in a behavior simulation environment, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, is depicted. The message flow diagram of **FIG 4.** illustrates the execution of a test event as in steps **312** through **326** of **FIG. 3** and will be discussed with reference to them.

[0048] The test event begins with step **312** of **FIG. 3**, which depicts the testing program **124** requesting testing event data substructure **202** from the testing event script file data structure **122** stored in RAM **102**. This is typically accomplished when processor **104** sends a 'what is next event' query **400** to RAM **102**.

[0049] The process depicted in **FIG. 3** then proceeds to step **314**, which depicts the testing program **124** receiving testing event data substructure **202**. This is accomplished when RAM **102** sends 'next event is' instruction **402** to testing program **124** on processor **104** from testing event script file data structure **122** on RAM **102**. For purposes of this discussion, the invention will be further described on the assumption that second testing event data substructure **204**, described with respect to **FIG 2**., was sent by RAM **102** as 'next event is' instruction **402** to testing program **124** on processor **104**. Analyzing second testing event data substructure **204**, processor **104** will use instructions contained in testing program **124** and simulation environment **118** to determine that component data field **220** indicates that the simulated hardware subsystem, on which the action described in second testing event data substructure **204** operates, is the disk interface subsystem.

[0050] The process depicted in **FIG. 3** next moves to step **322**, which depicts testing program **124** determining whether the pre-condition to the testing event is satisfied. This is accomplished by testing program **124** sending a 'checkpoint status' query **404** to simulated memory **126** through the messaging capabilities of the testing simulation environment **118**. Here, the 'checkpoint status' query **404** will request the latest sector read as in second event data testing structure **204**. Simulated memory will reply to the 'checkpoint status' query **404** with a 'checkpoint value' message **406**. For purposes of explanation, we will assume that the 'checkpoint value' message **406** returns the value 'LBA#' specified in checkpoint event qualifier **224**.

[0051] Having satisfied the checkpoint condition required in step **322**, the process depicted in **FIG. 3** would next progress to step **316**, which depicts sending a code set to simulated memory

126. In second testing event data substructure **204**, then, while the simulation environment program **118** is simulating the operation of the hardware model **120**, the testing program would write to simulated memory **126** a code set simulating the detection of a thermal asperity. This is accomplished by the testing program **124** sending an 'error code value' message **408** to the simulated memory **126** by writing the value of an error code to simulated memory **126.** Though the exemplary 'error code value' message **408** illustrated in **FIG. 4** contains only an error code, it could also contain debugging instructions in addition to the error code.

[0052] The process depicted in **FIG. 3** then proceeds to step **318**, which depicts the control program module **128** and hardware model **120** responding to the thermal asperity code. This is accomplished as simulated memory **126** sends 'request instruction' **410** message to control program module **128** and receives an 'instructions' reply **412**. Hardware model **120** carries out the instructions contained in 'instructions' reply **412**. Simulation environment program **118** will track the cycle times of interaction between control program module **128** and hardware model **120** to achieve a real-time processing of the error code response and will suspend tracking the 'clock time' of control program module **128** and hardware model **120** while performing operations that reside in the testing program **124** or simulation environment program **118**.

[0053] The process described in **FIG. 3** next moves to step **320**, which illustrates the testing program querying and recording the response of the simulated hardware to the code set in step **316**. Such recording is performed through the use of command lines in testing event script file data structure **122**, which includes commands to monitor and record variables in the simulation. Querying and recording are accomplished in **FIG. 4** as testing program **124** sends a 'provide response' query **414**, which will typically read the value of a register in simulated memory **126** and simulated memory responds with a 'response answer' message **416**, which will typically contain the value of a register in simulated memory **126**. Testing program **124** will typically then process the result obtained in response answer message **416** and report the result to process log **123** in RAM **102** by sending a 'store report' message **418** to process log **123** in RAM **102.**

[0054] The process described in **FIG. 3** then moves to step **323**, which illustrates the testing program **124** checking last entry data field **218**, which represents a flag set to inform testing program **124** that it has reached the end of testing event script file data structure **200**. In second testing event data substructure **204**, last entry data field **218** indicates that second testing event data substructure **204** is not the end of testing event script file data structure **200**. However, in nth testing event data substructure **206**, last entry data field **242** is set to the value of one. That last entry data field **242** is set to the value of one to indicate to testing program **124** that it has reached the end of testing script file data structure **124.**

[0055] If testing program **124** discovers that it has reached the last entry in testing event script file data structure **122**, as portrayed in **FIG. 4**, then the process next proceeds to step **324**, which depicts testing program **118** publishing a record of its results. This step will typically include storing process log **123** in storage **106** by sending a 'store process log' message **422** to storage **106** and may include delivery of a performance report to user I/O **114**. In **FIG. 4**, delivery of a performance report to user I/O **114** is accomplished as testing program **124** sends a performance report message **420** to I/O control **108**. This performance report message causes I/O control **108** to display a performance report on user I/O **114**. Once step **324** is completed, the process moves to step **326**, which illustrates testing program **124** ending the process of the preferred embodiment of the present invention.

[0056] If, in step **322**, testing program **124** does not conclude that it has reached the last entry in testing event script file data structure **122**, then the process next proceeds to step **312**, which depicts the testing program **124** requesting the next testing event data substructure **202** from the testing event script file data structure **122** stored in RAM **102**. This step involves a repetition of many of the processes demonstrated in **FIG. 4**.

[0057] While the invention has been particularly shown as described with reference to a preferred embodiment, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various changes in form and detail may be made therein without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. It is also important to note that although the present invention has been described in the context of a fully functional computer system, those skilled in the art will appreciate that the mechanisms of the present invention are capable of being distributed as a program product in a variety of forms, and that the present invention applies equally regardless of the particular type of signal bearing media utilized to actually carry out the distribution. Examples of signal bearing media include, without limitation, recordable type media such as floppy disks or CD ROMs and transmission type media such as analog or digital communications links.